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1

INDIA & NEIGHBOURS

1 'India and China activate border mechanism talks'

Context: India and China have activated the "working mechanism" at the diplomatic level, alongside the military-to-military conversation taking place at the field level to "disengage" and "de-escalate" the situation.

What is Working Mechanism for Consultation & Coordination?

- The "Working Mechanism for Consultation & Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC)" was established in January 2012 after border talks between then National Security Adviser (NSA) ShivshankarMenon and his Chinese counterpart Dai Bingguo, and is headed by joint secretary-level officials from both sides.
- They are entrusted to help the special representative for boundary talks, a position currently held by NSA AjitDoval.
- While joint secretary (East Asia) in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Naveen Srivastava, leads the Indian side, the Chinese side is led by Hong Liang, Director General, Department of Boundary and Oceanic Affairs, Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- These officials have had 14 meetings since 2012, the last one in July 2019, and meet more frequently than the special representatives.

Important Pacts:

- The border between China and India is 3,488 kilometres (2,167 mi) in length and often in sparsely populated areas.
- Its exact location has never been formally defined and is thus vague and in dispute.
- There are five major pacts that both sides agreed upon on the issue of maintaining "peace and tranquillity" along the borders. The pacts are-
  - the 1993 Agreement on Maintenance of Peace and Tranquility along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China Border Areas
  - the 1996 Agreement on Confidence Building Measures in the Military Field along the LAC
  - the 2005 Protocol on Modalities for the Implementation of the Confidence Building Measures in the Military Field along the LAC
  - the 2012 Agreement on the Establishment of a Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs
  - 2013 Border Defence Cooperation Agreement

The current situation:

- India's assessment is that the Chinese are involved in what is known in military parlance as "holding the line".
- While there is no agreed Line of Actual Control (LAC), both Chinese and Indian troops patrol up to their "claim lines" and then return.
- In the current situation, it appears that the Chinese have crossed their perception of LAC and are now camping at the spot in a bid to "hold the line".
- This "holding the line" tactic is backed by a large number of Chinese troops — much more than ordinary patrols, which is usually has 25-30 soldiers.
- This appears to give the impression that the Chinese are keen to dig their heels in.

The US's angle:

- US President Donald Trump offered to mediate between India and China to resolve what he called a "raging border dispute".
- This is the first time that a US President has offered to mediate between India and China, even as Washington has shown willingness many a time to be a peacemaker between Delhi and Islamabad.
- China, however, has said Delhi and Beijing were in touch with each other to address the issue, pre-empting Trump's move.

2 'Sikkim-Tibet Convention of 1890'

Context: The recent standoff between Indian and Chinese troops at Naku La in Sikkim, in an area of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) highlighted the historical Sikkim-Tibet Convention of 1890.

About

- According to the Convention, the boundary in the area is based on the watershed principles.
- **Article 1:** As per Article (1) of Convention of 1890, it was agreed that the boundary of Sikkim and Tibet shall be the crest of the mountain range separating the waters flowing into the Sikkim Teesta and its affluents, from the waters flowing into the Tibetan Mochu and northwards into other rivers of Tibet.
- The line commences at **Mount Gipmochi,** on the Bhutan frontier, and follows the above-mentioned water-parting to the point where it meets Nepal territory.
- **Article 2:** The second article recognised the British government's control over Sikkim.
- The Convention of 1890 was entered by the King of Great Britain on behalf of India before independence and around the time of independence, the Indian Independence (International Arrangement) Order, 1947 was notified by Secretariat of the Governor-General (Reforms) on August 14, 1947.

Why China is raking it up now?

- The Convention, according to Beijing, settles the border between the two regions.
- But India maintains that the borders in Doklam, the area in question, are yet to be settled.
- China stresses that the Sikkim section of the China-India boundary was defined by the 1890 treaty.
- China has accused India of "betrayal" of the treaty, a colonial era understanding of the boundary alignment relating to Tibet and Sikkim.

The dispute

- The border between India and China is not clearly demarcated throughout. There is no mutually agreed Line of Actual Control (LAC).
- Of the entire 3,488km Sino-Indian border, the only section on which both countries agree that there is no dispute is the 220km Sikkim-Tibet section of the boundary.
- This is because under the Anglo-Chinese Convention of 1890, the Sikkim-Tibet border was agreed upon and in 1895 it was jointly demarcated on the ground.
- Not only that, but the new government of People's Republic of China, which took power in 1949, confirmed this position in a formal note to the government of India on 26 December 1959.

So, Nathu La belongs to which country?

- The Gazetteer of Sikkim in 1894, while describing the physical features of Sikkim, also mentions the boundary that runs along **Naku la - ChortenNyima La**.
- The geographic alignment of the features were so prominent that it could easily be identified and recognized.
- Even analysing the available Google images of the pass, the location of **Naku La** could be discerned by anyone as the watershed parting line in the area was very prominent.
- There exists no ambiguity with respect to the location of the pass, since geographic realities cannot be altered.

3 'China and India clash on freezing battlefield'

Context: The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) recommended using rapid antigen test kits for diagnosis of Covid-19 in hotspots and healthcare settings in combination with the RT-PCR test.

About

- The Standard Q covid-19 Ag detection kit (rapid antigen test kits) is a rapid chromatographic immunoassay for qualitative detection of specific antigens to SARS-CoV-2.
- It has been developed by SD Biosensor, a South Korea based company, having its manufacturing unit in Manesar, Gurugram, India.
- The test can be interpreted as positive or negative after 15 minutes of putting the sample into the well by appearance of test and control lines, which can be read with a naked eye, requiring no specialized equipment.
- Maximum duration for interpreting a positive or negative test is 30 minutes.

What are Antigens?

- Antigens are substances that cause an immune response in the body by identifying substances in or markers on cells.
- It is a toxin or other foreign substance which induces an immune response in the body, especially the production of antibodies.
- Human body produces antibodies to fight antigens, or harmful substances, and tries to eliminate them.

What is real time RT–PCR?

- Real-Time-Polymerase Chain Reaction Test or Real time RT–PCR is a nuclear-derived method for detecting the presence of specific genetic material in any pathogen, including a virus.
- Originally, the method used radioactive isotope markers to detect targeted genetic materials, but subsequent refining has led to the replacement of isotopic labelling with special markers, most frequently fluorescent dyes.
- This technique allows to see the results almost immediately while the process is still ongoing, whereas conventional RT–PCR only provides results at the end of the process.
- Real time RT–PCR is one of the most widely used laboratory methods for detecting the COVID-19 virus.
- The causative agent for Covid19 is the SARS-CoV-2 virus. It is an RNA virus, that means it infiltrates a healthy cell to multiply and survive.
  - The SARS-CoV-2 RNA is generally detectable in respiratory specimens during the acute phase of infection.
  - For that upper and lower respiratory specimens (such as nasal, nasopharyngeal or oropharyngeal swabs, sputum, lower respiratory tract aspirates, bronchoalveolar lavage, and nasopharyngeal wash/aspirate or nasal aspirate) are collected.
  - This sample is treated with several chemical solutions that remove substances, such as proteins and fats, and extracts only the RNA present in the sample.
- Thus the RT-PCR test is for the identification of SARS-CoV-2 RNA.
- In this, the RNA is converted to DNA through a process called 'reverse transcription' for detecting viruses.

Significance of the step

- The rapid antigen kits allow faster diagnosis without laboratory examination.
- Antigen tests directly detect the presence of viral proteins using immunoassay techniques. They require successful swabs and since the tests do not amplify signal like NAATs, the sensitivity is lower.
- The advantage of antigen tests is that manufacturing such tests are easily scalable. In addition, tests can be run either in a laboratory setting with high throughput analyzers or in a point-of care low throughput setting with rapid lateral flow tests.

4 Mission Sagar

Context: Government of India launched Mission Sagar to provide assistance to Indian Ocean Region Nations amid the coronavirus crisis.

About

- As part of the 'Mission Sagar' program, this deployment is in line with India's role as the first responder in the region and builds on the excellent relations existing between these countries to battle the COVID-19 pandemic and its resultant difficulties.
- The deployment is in consonance with the Prime Ministers vision of Security and Growth for All in the Region 'SAGAR' and highlights the importance accorded by India to relations with her neighbouring countries and further strengthens the existing bond.
- The operation is being progressed in close coordination with Ministries of Defence and External Affairs.

What is SAGAR?

- In 2015, India unveiled it's strategic vision for the Indian Ocean i.e. Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR).
- It is an increasing recognition of the increasing importance of maritime security, maritime commons and cooperation.
- The initiative is in line with the principles of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). The mission aims to
- to seek a climate of trust and transparency
  - respect for international maritime rules and norms by all countries
  - sensitivity to(towards) each other's interests
  - peaceful resolution of maritime issues
  - increase in maritime cooperation

How will it be conducted?

- As part of the Government of India outreach amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, Indian Naval Ship Kesari has departed for Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar and Comoros, to provide Food Items, COVID related Medicines including HCQ Tablets and Special Ayurvedic Medicines with Medical Assistance Teams.
- The Ship will deliver consignments of Covid related essential medicines to Mauritius, Madagascar, Comoros and Seychelles and about 600 tonnes of food items to Maldives.
- In addition, in the case of Mauritius, a special consignment of Ayurvedic medicines is also being sent
- The consignments meant for Madagascar and Comoros also includes Hydroxychloroquine tablets, which have already been sent earlier to Mauritius, Maldives and Seychelles.

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2

INDIA & WORLD

1 Various Military Exercises

Context: Indian Armed Forces conduct/participates in various bilateral and multilateral military exercises with foreign countries. The details of such exercise include the following:

About the Exercises

Sl. No.	Country	Exercise
1.	Australia	Ex AUSTRA HIND, Ex AUSINDEX, EX PITCH BLACK
2.	Bangladesh	Ex SAMPRITI, IN-BN CORPAT, IN-BN BILAT, IN-BN SF EXERCISE, TABLE TOP EX, SAMVEDNA
3.	Brazil & South Africa	IBSAMAR
4.	China	Ex HAND IN HAND
5.	Egypt	Ex CYCLONE
6.	France	Ex SHAKTI, Ex VARUNA, GARUDA
7.	Indonesia	Ex GARUDA SHAKTI, IND-INDO CORPAT IND-INDO BILAT
8.	Israel	Ex BLUE FLAG
9.	Japan	Ex DHARMA GUARDIAN, Ex JIMEX
10.	Kazakhstan	Ex KAZIND
11.	Kyrgyzstan	Ex KHANJAR
12.	Malaysia	Ex HARIMAU SHAKTI, Ex IN-RMN BILAT, HOP EX
13.	Maldives	Ex EKUVERIN, EX EKATHA
14.	Mongolia	Ex NOMADIC ELEPHANT
15.	Myanmar	Ex IMBEX, IMCOR, IN-MN BILAT, TABLE TOP EX

16.	Nepal	Ex SURYA KIRAN
17.	Oman	Ex AL NAGAH, NASEEM-AL-BAHR, Ex EASTERN BRIDGE
18.	Qatar	ZA'IR AL BAHR
19.	Russia	EX INDRA, EX AVIAINDRA
20.	Seychelles	Ex LAMITIYE
21.	Singapore	SIMBEX, JOINT MILITARY TRAINING
22.	Sri Lanka	Ex MITRA SHAKTI, SLINEX, IN-SLN SF Ex, SAMVEDNA
23.	Thailand	Ex MAITREE, INDO-THAI CORPAT, Ex SIAM BHARAT
24.	UAE	DESERT EAGLE
25.	UK	Ex AJEY WARRIOR, KONKAN, INDRADHANUSH
26.	USA	Ex YUDHABHAYAS, Ex VAJRA PRAHAR, SPITTING COBRA, SANGAM (IN-USN EOD Ex), RED FLAG, Ex COPE INDIA
27.	Uzbekistan	Ex DUSTLIK
28.	Vietnam	VINBAX, IN-VPN BILAT
29.	Multilateral	BIMSTEC
30.	Multilateral	AFINDEX
31.	Multilateral	MEDEX
32.	Multilateral	SCO - PEACE MISSION
33.	Multilateral	Ex TSENTR
34.	Multilateral	CORMORANT STRIKE
35.	Multilateral	KHAAN QUEST
36.	Multilateral	COBRA GOLD
37.	Multilateral	ADMM Plus Exercises
38.	Multilateral	BLACK CARILLION
39.	Multilateral	KAKADU
40.	Multilateral	KOMODO
41.	Multilateral	IONS WORKING GROUP EXERCISES
42.	Multilateral	EOD J2A
43.	Multilateral	MARISX
44.	Multilateral	MALABAR
45.	Multilateral	RIMPAC
46.	Multilateral	CUTLASS EXPRESS

47.	Multilateral	SALVEX
48.	Multilateral	SEACAT
49.	Multilateral	SITMEX
50.	Multilateral	MILAN
51.	Multilateral	WPNS Exercises

Significance of military exercises:

- In the domain of international relations, military diplomacy has, in recent years, emerged as a major tool to further diplomatic interests of nations. Participation in international level military exercises is an indication of the highest level of trust and confidence between the member nations.
- It is a key confidence-building measure (CBM) and an indication of the faith reposed by India on another nation or a group of member nations.
- On the operational side, military exercises enable militaries to understand each other's drills and procedures, overcome language barriers, and facilitate familiarisation with equipment capabilities.
- Perhaps, the most important advantage of joint military exercises is 'strategic signalling'. A joint exercise with one or more nations serves the purpose of signalling to a third country of the influence we have in the region and a demonstration of our resolve to further our diplomatic objectives.

2 Blue Dot network

Context: India and the United States may not have signed the elusive limited trade deal during the visit of US President Donald Trump, but Washington was able to ask New Delhi to participate in the Blue Dot Network (BDN), an initiative under the quadrilateral mechanism that seeks to build and finance quality infrastructure projects.

About

- The concept of the Blue Dot Network was officially launched on 4 November 2019 at the Indo-Pacific Business Forum in Bangkok, Thailand.
- It will be led by the US (**International Development Finance Corporation (DFC)**), along with Japan (Japanese Bank for International Cooperation) and Australia (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade)- the three countries, along with India, form the Quadrilateral grouping.
- **Multi-stakeholder initiative:** It is meant to be a multi-stakeholder initiative that aims to bring governments, the private sector and civil society together to promote "high quality, trusted standards for global infrastructure development".
- This means that as part of this initiative, infrastructure projects will be vetted and approved by the network depending on standards, as per which, the projects should meet certain global infrastructure principles.
- The projects that are approved will get a "Blue Dot", thereby setting universal standards of excellence, which will attract private capital to projects in developing and emerging economies.

Countering China's Belt and Road Initiative?

- The proposal for the Blue Dot network is part of the US's Indo-Pacific strategy, which is aimed at countering Chinese ambitious BRI.

- Blue Dot may be seen as a counter to BRI, it will need a lot of work for two reasons.
  - First, there is a fundamental difference between BRI and Blue Dot — while the former involves direct financing, giving countries in need immediate short-term relief, the latter is not a direct financing initiative and therefore may not be what some developing countries need.
  - Secondly, Blue Dot will require coordination among multiple stakeholders when it comes to grading projects. "Given the past experience of Quad, the countries involved in it are still struggling to put a viable bloc. Therefore, it remains to be seen how Blue Dot fares in the long run." (Quad is an informal strategic dialogue between the US, Japan, Australia and India)

US foreign policy towards China

- Before 2001, US foreign policy was focussed towards integrating China into its plan, but this changed after China's emergence as a global superpower.
- Under Barack Obama, US foreign policy started shifting focus to Asia, where the US wanted to counter China's growing influence.
- The Indo-Pacific region, which stretches from India's west coast to the west coast of the US, is the most economically dynamic and populous part of the world.
- Further, the US sees China's infrastructure investments and trade strategies as reinforcing its geopolitical aspirations, including efforts to build and militarise outposts in the South China Sea, which as per the US, restricts the free movement of trade and undermines regional stability.

Significance of the network:

- **Boost to infrastructure:** A country that joins the Blue Dot Network as a partner will boost its project capability efforts. Further, if the infrastructure development projects of that particular country obtain a Blue Dot certification, they will be seen as adhering to the highest level of global standards.
- **Access to financing institutions:** Access to private and public financing institutions will help mitigate financing risks, acting as an impetus for developing countries like India to smoothly undertake development projects domestically as well as internationally.
- **Clear project standards:** The Blue Dot Network will provide countries with clear project standards. Projects, companies, and governments that meet or uphold the standards can build public confidence in their commitment to good practices

3 'Trump signs order against hiring H-1B visa holders for federal contracts'

Context: In a huge blow to Indian IT professionals eyeing the US job market, President Donald Trump signed an executive order preventing federal agencies from contracting or subcontracting foreign workers -- mainly those on H-1B visa -- from hiring.

About

What is H-1B visa?

- The H-1B is a visa in the United States under the Immigration and Nationality Act, which allows US employers to temporarily employ foreign workers in speciality occupations.
- A speciality occupation requires the application of a specialised knowledge and a bachelor's degree or equivalent of work experience.
  - The duration of a stay is three years and can be extended up to six years.
  - Once this period is over, the visa holder will need to re-apply.

- The law says that employers must generally withhold Social Security and Medicare taxes from the wages paid to employees in H1B visa status.
- A person in the H-1B visa status must continue to be employed by the employer in order to stay in the H-1B status.
- In case the employment ends for any reason, the employee must be leave the United States, unless the person applies for and is granted change in status or finds another employer with the H-1B status.
- Apart from the H-1B visas, the US government also issues L1 visas which allow companies to transfer highly skilled workers to US for a period of up to seven years.
- H-2B visas allow food and agricultural workers to seek employment in the US.

Background

- The move came over a month after the Trump administration in June 23 suspended the H-1B visas along with other types of foreign work visas until the end of 2020 to protect American workers in a crucial election year.
- The new restrictions took effect from June 24.

The impact on Indians:

- The proclamation issued will immediately affect the processing of all new H-1B, H-2B, J and L visa categories.
- This would mean that those who do not have a valid non-immigrant visa as of June 23 and those who are outside the US, will not be allowed to enter the country until December 31 2020.
- While about 70% of the H-1B and L-1 visas are granted to Indian nationals, this June Ban is unlikely to have a major, immediate impact on Indian IT/ITeS companies as only a relatively small number of H-1B employees will be affected.
- However, those workers in essential services in the food sector have been given a reprieve and their entry shall be decided by the consular officer of the immigration services.
- Suspension of the H1-B visas by the US will cost domestic IT firms Rs 1,200 crore and have a marginal 0.25-0.30 per cent impact on their profitability.
- The new order however will not impact H-1B, H2B, J and L visa holders and their spouses or children who are already in the US.

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3

INTERNATIONAL EVENTS

1 Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan

Context: The United States has signed an agreement with Taliban insurgents that could pave the way for ending the 18-year-war in Afghanistan in Doha (Qatar).

About

Highlights of the Agreement

- **Military troops withdrawal:** It lays out a 14-month timetable for the withdrawal of "all military forces of the United States, its allies, and Coalition partners, including all non-diplomatic civilian personnel, private security contractors, trainers, advisors, and supporting services personnel."
- **Release of prisoners:** The agreement also calls for the release of 5,000 Taliban prisoners and 1,000 "prisoners of the other side" on the first day of intra-Afghan negotiations. The relevant sides have the goal of releasing all the remaining prisoners over the course of the subsequent three months.
- **Comprehensive Ceasefire** between the Afghan Government and Taliban.
- **The prevention of the use of Afghanistan by any group or individual against the security of the United States and its allies.**
- **Facilitation of an intra-Afghan dialogue:** The participants of intra-Afghan negotiations will discuss the date and modalities of a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire, including agreement over the future political roadmap of Afghanistan.

India's Stand

- India has been always supportive of the inclusive peace process, specifically Afghan-owned, Afghan-led and Afghan-controlled.
- The participation of the Afghan government's delegation during the Doha agreement as well as the upcoming intra-Afghan peace negotiations would be following the path desired by India.
- The deal has reiterated India's commitment to Afghanistan's pursuit of "sustainable peace and reconciliation".
- Thus, India has accepted the Doha Agreement (2020).

Conclusion

- Achieving lasting peace in Afghanistan will require more than the Doha Agreement. It is indeed a good step for peace in Aisa as well in Afghanistan. To resolve conflict within Afghanistan, the battlefield needs to be isolated i.e. external support to the terrorist activities needs to be abandoned. Also, the countries need to keep their respective interests aside, to build peace in the region.

Background

- The war in Afghanistan was launched by the US in 2001 after the 9/11 attack. The US-led coalition aimed to overthrow the Taliban.
- However, the war in Afghanistan got derailed as the U.S. shifted focus and resources towards Iraq from 2003 onwards.
- The end objective of a stable and peaceful Afghanistan began to recede as the Taliban launched their insurgency in 2005 after they had recovered, regrouped and refinanced themselves from their sanctuary in Pakistan.
- Since then, the insurgency has gathered momentum and also exposed the U.S 's policy weaknesses.
- After taking over in 2009, President Barack Obama authorised a surge in U.S. troop presence with the objective to gain a decisive victory over the insurgency. He simultaneously announced the drawdown of forces would commence in 2011, and by 2014 the Afghan security forces would take charge of all combat operations.
- However, this only encouraged the Taliban insurgency and exposed the shortcomings of the Afghan army and the police forces, in terms of numbers, training and equipment to deal with the post-2014 situation.
- In 2014, the U.S. announced the withdrawal of the bulk of soldiers but a few thousand U.S. soldiers were to stay behind to "advise, train and assist" the Afghan security forces under Operation Resolute Support.
- In 2017, the U.S. President Donald Trump laid out a strategy for "Afghanistan and South Asia".
- His policy was different from those of his predecessors as it stated that American involvement in Afghanistan was "not for nation-building" but was limited to "killing terrorists."
- He called this policy "Principled Realism" - with a shift from a time-based approach to one based on conditions. This policy was based on two pillars:
- Military Involvement: The additional troops which would serve two roles: counterterrorism missions and training the Afghan forces.
- Political Involvement: A negotiated political settlement with the Taliban, if the situation moves in that direction.
- Since October 2018, Taliban representatives and US officials have been meeting to chalk out a peace treaty.

2 Saudi Arabia hosts G20 financial leaders meet

Context

Finance ministers and central bank governors from G20 nations meet in the Saudi capital for a two-day gathering to discuss the global economy and the risks from the coronavirus epidemic.

About

- The **Group of Twenty (G20)** is the premier forum for its members' international economic cooperation and decision-making.

- Its membership comprises 19 countries plus the European Union.
- Each G20 president invites several guest countries each year.
- G20 leaders meet annually.
- In addition, Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors meet regularly during the year to discuss ways to strengthen the global economy, reform international financial institutions, improve financial regulation and implement the key economic reforms that are needed in each member economy.
- The G20 started in 1999 as a meeting of Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors in the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis.
- In 2008, the first G20 Leaders' Summit was held, and the group played a key role in responding to the global financial crisis.
- The G20 is supported by international organisations, including the Financial Stability Board, the International LabourOrganisation, the International Monetary Fund, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the United Nations, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization.

G20 Summit, 2020

- Saudi Arabia became the first Arab nation to hold the G20 presidency in its capital, Riyadh.
- The theme of Summit- **"Realising Opportunities of the 21st Century for All".**

Highlights of the meet

- Global economic growth remains slow due to geopolitical, trade tensions, and policy uncertainty.
- However, it is expected to improve in 2020 and 2021 due to loose monetary policy and an easing of trade tension.
- The countries have projected a V-shaped, rapid recovery for the global economy.
- But it has warned about the uncertainty around the spread of the coronavirus, rising debt levels and climate change.
- Further, India has also demanded closer collaboration between international revenue agencies to investigate tax details of offenders who cross borders to escape tax investigation.

3 'Both Koreas violated the armistice agreement UNC'

Context: Both North and South Korea recently violated the armistice agreement that governs their shared border, according to a probe by the United Nations Command (UNC).

What is armistice agreement?

- This armistice signed on July 27, 1953, formally ended the war in Korea. North and South Korea remain separate and occupy almost the same territory they had when the war began.
- The Korean War, which began on June 25, 1950, when the North Koreans invaded South Korea, officially ended on July 27, 1953.
- The Korean Armistice Agreement is somewhat exceptional in that it is purely a military document—no nation is a signatory to the agreement.
- Specifically the Armistice Agreement:
  - suspended open hostilities
  - withdrew all military forces and equipment from a 4,000-meter-wide zone, establishing the Demilitarized Zone as a buffer between the forces
  - prevented both sides from entering the air, ground, or sea areas under control of the other
  - arranged release and repatriation of prisoners of war and displaced persons

- established the Military Armistice Commission (MAC) and other agencies to discuss any violations and to ensure adherence to the truce terms

Demilitarized Zone (DMZ):

- Stretching 150 miles along the 38th parallel, the 2.5-mile-wide Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) was established in 1953 as a buffer zone between the warring communist north and capitalist south.
- Today, the DMZ proliferates in popular culture as one of the most heavily fortified borders in the world and a living vestige of the Cold War era—it's also a tourist attraction.

A brief history of North and South Korea:

- North and South Korea have been divided for more than 70 years, ever since the Korean Peninsula became an unexpected casualty of the escalating Cold War between two rival superpowers: the Soviet Union and the United States.
- In 1945, at the conclusion of World War II, the United States and Soviet Union partitioned the peninsula at the 38th parallel with little regard to the sentiments of the Korean people.
- Arbitrarily divided by ideologically opposed, interloping regimes, tensions between the North and South soon escalated into the three-year Korean War that ravaged the population.
- On July 27, 1953, the DMZ was established as part of ceasefire negotiated between UN and communist forces. A peace treaty was never signed.

About UNC:

- The UNC is commanded by an American general.
- It oversees affairs in the heavily fortified Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) between the two Koreas, which remain technically at war.

4 'International Religious Freedom (IRF) Report'

Context: The U.S. State Department has released its annual International Religious Freedom (IRF) Report, a survey of the state of religious freedom across the world.

About the Report

- The annual Report to Congress on International Religious Freedom is also known as the International Religious Freedom Report.
- The Report describes the status of religious freedom, government policies violating religious belief and practices of groups, religious denominations and individuals, and U.S. policies promoting religious freedom.
- The report is published annually by the US State Department as part of the legal requirement to the US Congress.

Key-highlights of the Report

- The report listed countries for positive developments in religious freedom and negative examples (India was not cited in either list).
- Nicaragua, Nigeria and China were cited as negative examples.
- In China, state-sponsored repression against all religions continues to intensify. The Chinese Communist Party is now ordering religious organisations to infuse communist dogmas into their teachings and practice of their faith.
- Uighurs, Tibetans, Falun Gong followers and Christians were being repressed by China.

The India section of the report

- The country report for India, which looks back on the developments in 2019, takes note of the change in the status of Jammu and Kashmir, the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC).
- It discusses in detail mob lynchings and anti-conversion laws and related issues.
- It details incidents of "cow vigilantism" and other types of mob violence — such as the attack last year on Tabrez Ansari in Jharkhand.
- The report also takes note of the Babri Masjid decision by the Supreme Court and the challenges to the 2018 reversal of a ban on some women entering the Sabarimala temple.
- It outlines the U.S. engagement with India on the issues.

US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) Report

- In April this year, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), an independent bipartisan commission and separate from the State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom, recommended to Secretary of State Michael Pompeo that the State Department downgrade India's religious freedom to the lowest grade — 'Country of Particular Concern (CPC)'.
- The Secretary of State is not obliged to accept the recommendation and has not always done so.
- As per law, the CPC and the Special Watch List (one level less severe than CPC) designations have to be made by the administration no later than 90 days after the publication of the IRF Report.

How India reacted?

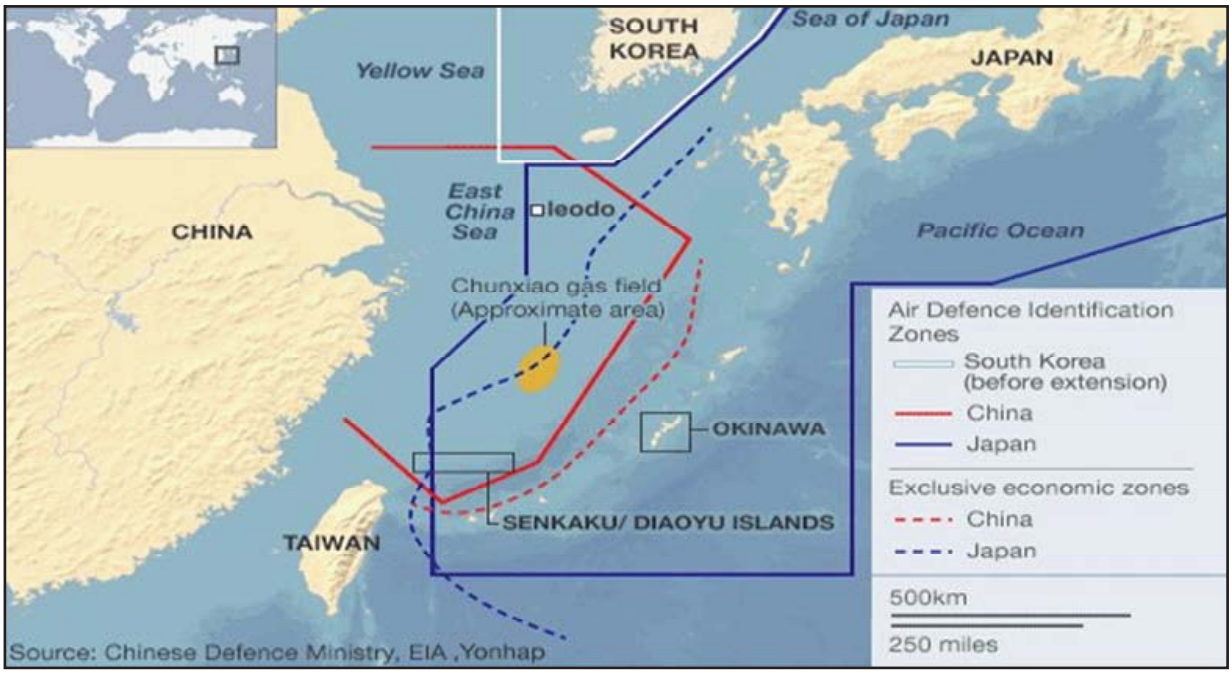
- India rejected the US State Department's annual International Religious Freedom Report for 2019.
- The Ministry of External Affairs said Washington has no locus standi to comment on the matters.

5 'Japan to rename areas of islands disputed with China'

Context: Japan's Ishigaki city Assembly passed a bill to rename an administrative area covering a group of islands in the East China Sea, immediately triggering backlash from China and Taiwan, both of which also claim the uninhabited islets as their own.

About

- The disputed islands are known as the Senkaku in Japan and the Diaoyu in China.
- Ties between China and Japan have been strained by a territorial row over a group of islands, known as the Senkaku islands in Japan and the Diaoyu islands in China.
- There are total eight uninhabited islands and rocks in the East China Sea.
- They have a total area of about 7 sq km and lie north-east of Taiwan, east of the Chinese mainland and south-west of Japan's southern-most prefecture, Okinawa. The islands are controlled by Japan.



The changed names

- The assembly changed the name of the southern Japan area containing the Senkaku Islands from "Tonoshiro" to "TonoshiroSenkaku," which both Beijing and Taipei see as an attempt to cement Tokyo's claim by inserting the Japanese name "Senkaku."
- The renaming takes effect on Oct. 1 and it is aimed at resolving administrative confusion between a locale in downtown Ishigaki, which shares the name "Tonoshiro" with the isles.

What is Japan's claim?

- Japan says it surveyed the islands for 10 years in the 19th Century and determined that they were uninhabited.
- On 14 January 1895 Japan erected a sovereignty marker and formally incorporated the islands into Japanese territory.
- After World War Two, Japan renounced claims to a number of territories and islands including Taiwan in the 1951 Treaty of San Francisco.
- These islands, however, came under US trusteeship and were returned to Japan in 1971 under the Okinawa reversion deal.

Claims made by China

- China says that the islands have been part of its territory since ancient times, serving as important fishing grounds administered by the province of Taiwan.
- Taiwan was ceded to Japan in the Treaty of Shimonoseki in 1895, after the Sino-Japanese war.
- When Taiwan was returned in the Treaty of San Francisco, China says the islands should have been returned too. Beijing says Taiwan's Kuomintang leader Chiang Kai-shek did not raise the issue, even when the islands were named in the later Okinawa reversion deal, because he depended on the US for support.
- Separately, Taiwan also claims the islands.

Why are they important?

- They matter because they are close to important shipping lanes, offer rich fishing grounds and lie near potential oil and gas reserves.

- They are also in a strategically significant position, amid rising competition between the US and China for military primacy in the Asia-Pacific region

6 Russia marks WW2 Victory Day

Context: Russia has marked 75 years since victory over Nazi Germany in World War Two despite cancelling its traditional military parade because of the coronavirus outbreak.

About

- Victory Day marks the end of **World War II** and the victory of the Allied Forces in 1945. The day marks Germany's surrender to the Soviet Union in 1945.
- It became the end of the Great Patriotic War for the USSR, which lost about 25 million citizens in the four years of fighting.
- Interestingly, until its 20th anniversary (May 9, 1965), Victory Day was not a major holiday.
- Apart from the anniversaries in 1965 and 1985, Victory Day celebrations in the Soviet Union did not feature a military parade.

This tradition started in 1995.

World War II

- World War II was a global war that lasted from 1939 to 1945. It was a battle between two groups of countries- the Allies and the Axis.
  - The major Allied Powers were Britain, France, Russia, China and the United States.
  - The major Axis Powers were Germany, Italy and Japan.
- Before World War 2 began, Germany was ruled by Adolf Hitler. Together with the Nazi Party, he wanted Germany to rule Europe.
- To gain more land and power, on 1 September 1939 German troops invaded Poland. After Hitler refused to stop the invasion, Britain and France declared war on Germany – World War II had begun.
- The war resulted in the extension of the Soviet Union's power to nations of eastern Europe, enabled a communist movement to eventually achieve power in China, and marked the decisive shift of power in the world away from the states of western Europe and toward the United States and the Soviet Union.

Role of Indian Military

- The British Indian Armed Forces during World War-II were one of the largest Allied Forces contingents which took part in the North and East African Campaign, Western Desert Campaign and the European Theatre against the Axis powers.
- This campaign witnessed sacrifice by over 87,000 Indian servicemen beside 34,354 being wounded.
- The Indian Military not only fought on all fronts, but also ensured delivery of goods along the Southern, Trans-Iranian Lend-Lease route, along which weapons, ammunitions, spare parts for equipment and food went to the Soviet Union, Iran and Iraq.

Key-highlights

- The parade was reviewed by Russian President Vladimir Putin, war veterans and guests, including Defence Minister Rajnath Singh.

- This year, 14,000 troops and several hundred military machines took part in the parade, including 30 historic T-34 tanks.
- Modern vehicles also participated, including AFV Terminator, T-72, and T-14 Armata tanks, 9K720 Iskander missile systems, and many other cutting-edge military hardware, Sputnik International reported.
- Planes and helicopters also participated in an air parade, with Su-25s colouring the sky in white, blue, and red — the colours of the Russian flag.

What's so special this time?

- A 75-member Tri-service contingent of the Indian Armed Forces participated in the 75th anniversary of the Victory Day Parade at the iconic Red Square in Moscow.
- The Tri-Service contingent of the Indian Armed Forces comprised 75 all ranks and marched along with contingents of Russian Armed Forces and 17 other countries, according to an official statement.

7 Inclusion of Taiwan in WHO

Context: The leaders of United States (US)'s congressional foreign affairs committees have written to over 60 nations (Germany, Thailand, Canada, Britain, Saudi Arabia and Australia) to garner their support towards the inclusion of Taiwan in the World Health Organisation (WHO).

About

- The country is commonly known by the name "Taiwan" but officially it is actually called the Republic of China.
- The island of Taiwan floats in the South China Sea, just over one hundred miles from the coast of mainland China.
- Taiwa is not a member of the WHO, because most governments do not recognize it as an independent state.
- The Communist Party in China claims Taiwan as its own territory, even though it has never had sovereign control there.

World Health Organization

- The World Health Organizationis a specialized agency of the United Nations.
- It was inagurated following the second world war on 7 April 1948 – a date now celebrated as World Health Day.
- Based in Geneva, Switzerland, the WHO has 194 member states.

Reason behind the move

- To this date, Taiwan is not a part of the WHO owing to objections from China which calls the nation a part of its own.
- However, that has not deterred Taiwan from seeking to join a ministerial meeting of WHO's decision-making body, the World Health Assembly (WHA). The meeting is set to be held in the coming days of this month.
- Taiwan is trying to partake in the meeting with packing from the US and several of its allies.

- Taiwan's response to the COVID-19 has been recognised as commendable by the health authorities globally since the country has reportedly had 380 confirmed cases and 5 deaths, a stunningly low number for a population of 23.6 million.
- It has emerged as a global exemplar. Yet it remains effectively locked out of membership in the WHO due to its complex relationship with China.

How will it impact India?

- India is among the 179 of the 193 member states of the UN that do not maintain diplomatic ties with Taiwan.
- This is also a challenge for India, which is set to take over as the chairperson of the WHO's executive decision making body in May-end.
- India is in a tough spot over rising global pressure and sharpening faultlines between the US and China.
- India has to take a stand on whether it is going to support the US's demand of reinstating Taiwan's observer status at the WHA which China will argue goes against New Delhi's longstanding 'One-China' policy.

Conclusion

- If India aims to share ideas and best practices among countries in the Indo-Pacific region to respond effectively to the complex challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic then supporting Taiwan's admission would be a welcome move. India's foreign policy vision has evolved stance where issue-based alignments are becoming the norm. Its ties with Taiwan should also evolve accordingly.

8 'A row between Turkey and Greece raising tension in the eastern Mediterranean'

Context: NATO allies Turkey and Greece have locked horns over who gets to explore hydrocarbons in the Eastern Mediterranean. This latest spat over gas reserves and maritime rights has prompted fears that tensions could escalate further.

About

Eastern Mediterranean waters

- Eastern Mediterranean denotes the region in the east of the Mediterranean Sea (the Levantine Sea) in Western Asia.

- The countries and territories of this region include Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Palestine, Egypt and Libya.
- The East Mediterranean includes:
  - the **Adriatic Sea**, northwest of the main body of the eastern Mediterranean Sea, separates the Italian peninsula from the Balkan peninsula and extends from the Strait of Otranto to the south (where it connects to the Ionian Sea) to the **Gulf of Venice** to the north
  - the **Ionian Sea** lies to the south of Italy and Greece
  - the **Aegean Sea**, located between the Greek and the Anatolian peninsulas, with the island of Crete defining its southern border
  - the **Levantine Sea**, separated from the Ionian Sea by a submarine ridge between the western end of Crete and Cyrenaica (Libya); it extends to the south of the Anatolia peninsula.
  - It is bordered by Turkey in the north, Syria, Lebanon, Israel and the Gaza Strip in the east, Egypt and Libya in the south, and the Aegean Sea in the northwest.
  - The western border to the open Mediterranean (the also called **Libyan Sea**) is defined as a line from the **cape Ra's al-Hilal** in Libya to the island of **Gavdos**, south of Crete.

The Mediterranean neighbours

- For centuries, Turkey and Greece have shared a chequered history.
- Greece won independence from modern Turkey's precursor, the Ottoman Empire, in 1830.
- In 1923, the two countries exchanged their Muslim and Christian populations – a migration whose scale has only been surpassed in history by the Partition of India.
- The two nations continue to oppose each other on the decades-old Cyprus conflict, and on two occasions have almost gone to war over exploration rights in the Aegean Sea.
- Both countries are, however, part of the 30-member NATO alliance, and Turkey is officially a candidate for full membership of the European Union, of which Greece is a constituent.

How did the Eastern Mediterranean become the eye of a geopolitical storm?

- For decades, Eastern Mediterranean maritime boundary disputes were a local affair, confined to sovereignty claims and counterclaims among Cyprus, Greece, and Turkey.
- But over the past five years, the region's offshore natural gas resources have turned the Eastern Mediterranean into a key strategic arena through which larger geopolitical fault-lines involving the EU and the MENA region converge.
- Italy and France have played integral roles in driving that change, which has placed the EU and Turkey's already complicated relationship onto more adversarial terms.
- The game changer was the August 2015 discovery of the massive Zohr natural gas field in Egyptian maritime territory.

What about international laws?

- The territorial claims of Greece and Cyprus are backed by international law under the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.
- But Turkey is not a signatory to the convention so even if Turkey's latest actions were found illegal by an international maritime tribunal, Turkey likely would ignore rulings against it.
- Cyprus and Greece have not brought a case against Turkey before the tribunal overseeing the Law of the Sea.

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4

INTERNATIONAL & REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

1 'Is WHO China-centric?'

Context: US President Donald Trump has attacked the World Health Organization (WHO) for being too "China-centric" in its tackling of the Coronavirus pandemic.

About

- The World Health Organization (WHO) was born during the moment of hopeful internationalism that followed the chaos of the second world war.
- The idea of global collaboration in fighting disease was not new – in the 19th century, at periodic International Sanitary Conferences, countries had standardised quarantine procedures for cholera and yellow fever – but the WHO constitution, adopted in 1948, envisioned a far grander global mission, nothing less than "the attainment by all people of the highest possible levels of health".
- WHO is the directing and coordinating authority for health within the United Nations system.
- It is responsible for providing leadership on global health matters, shaping the health research agenda, setting norms and standards, articulating evidence-based policy options, providing technical support to countries and monitoring and assessing health trends.

How is the WHO funded?

- Geneva-headquartered World Health Organization, receives vast amounts of money from the United States. Mainly there are four kinds of contributions that make up funding for the organization:
  - **Assessed contributions:** From 1948, when WHO was established, the Organisation has relied on the assessed contributions of its member states for its regular budget. These are the dues countries pay in order to be a member of the Organization.
  - **Voluntary contributions**: These contributions come from Member States or from other partners.
  - **Core voluntary contributions**: Core Voluntary contributions allow less well-funded activities to benefit from a better flow of resources and ease implementation bottlenecks.
  - **Pandemic Influenza Preparedness (PIP) Contributions**: PIP contributions aim to improve and strengthen the sharing of influenza viruses with human pandemic potential, and to increase the access of developing countries to vaccines and other pandemic related supplies.

Claims made by US:

- The WHO helped the Chinese Communist Party hide the threat of COVID-19 from the world and now more than 10,000 Americans are dead, a number that is expected to rise dramatically in the coming weeks.
- The United States is the largest contributor to WHO. It is not right that Americans' hard-earned tax dollars are being used to propagate China's lies and hide information that could have saved lives.
- For reasons beyond understanding, the World Health Organization acted as a silent partner in this effort instead of protecting the lives of millions across the world, including hundreds of thousands of American citizens.
- Our hard-earned tax dollars should not go to a global organization more concerned with not offending the Chinese government than providing accurate information and protecting innocent lives.

How has the WHO responded?

- The WHO has rejected US's criticism, saying that the organization has done tremendous work in providing guidance as COVID-19 travelled across the world.
- It is clear that the WHO has been supporting numerous countries with equipment and training.

What is the reason behind such situation?

- There is a simple reason for this. For all the responsibility vested in the WHO, it has little power.
- Unlike international bodies such as the World Trade Organization, the WHO, which is a specialised body of the UN, has no ability to bind or sanction its members.
- Its annual operating budget, about $2bn in 2019, is smaller than that of many university hospitals, and split among a dizzying array of public health and research projects.
- The WHO has been drained of power and resources.
- Its coordinating authority and capacity are weak. Its ability to direct an international response to a life-threatening epidemic is non-existent.

Conclusion:

The World Health Organization is less like a military general or elected leader with a strong mandate, and more like an underpaid sports coach wary of "losing the dressing room", who can only get their way by charming, grovelling, cajoling and occasionally pleading with the players to do as they say.

2 'China to join UN arms trade treaty'

Context: China's top legislative body has voted in favour of the country's bid to join the UN-sponsored ATT, which seeks to regulate international trade in conventional military equipment.

- The ATT was established in December 2014. Key principles of membership include-
  - self-defence rights
  - the intent to settle disputes through peaceful means
  - to refrain from issuing threats or use of force against the territorial integrity of any country
  - to respect human rights

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- The treaty requires member countries to keep records of international transfers of weapons and to prohibit cross-border shipments that could be used in human rights violations or attacks on civilians.
- The treaty has a global membership of 106 countries, with Namibia the most recent to join in April.
- Major military exporters including France, Germany, Israel, Spain, and the United Kingdom are members of the treaty.

Is US behind China's decision?

- It comes after US President Donald Trump announced plans last year to pull the United States out of the agreement -- which entered into force in 2014.
- The US Senate never ratified the 2013 Arms Trade Treaty after former president Barack Obama endorsed it, and Trump has said he would revoke his predecessor's signature.
- It is among a number of international agreements reached under the Obama administration that Trump has moved to pull out of.

China's participation in conventional arms control

- China actively implements the **UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (PoA)** and participates in the work of the **Group of Governmental Experts (GGE)** on the **United Nations Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA)** for successive sessions.
- China serves as the contracting party of the **United Nations Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW)** and its annexed Protocols and actively fulfills its obligations under the convention, submitting reports of the PoA, the UNROCA and the CCW in time.
- Besides, China also participated in the negotiation processes of the ATT and participated in the follow-up conferences of the parties as an observer.

India's take on the treaty

- From the beginning of the ATT process, India has maintained that such a treaty should make a real impact on illicit trafficking in conventional arms and their illicit use especially by terrorists and other unauthorised and unlawful non-state actors.
- India has also stressed consistently that the ATT should ensure a balance of obligations between exporting and importing states.
- Further, India cannot accept that the Treaty be used as an instrument in the hands of exporting states to take unilateral force majeure measures against importing states parties without consequences.
- India has been an active participant in the ATT negotiations. Underlying our participation in these extended negotiations was the principle that member states have a legitimate right to self-defence and our belief that there is no conflict between the pursuit of national security objectives and the aspiration that the Arms Trade Treaty be strong, balanced and effective.
- This is consistent with the strong and effective national export controls that India already has in place with respect to export of defence items.

3 'SIPRI report'

Context: India stands seventh among the nine countries armed with nuclear weapons in terms of inventory of warheads, according to the SIPRI Year Book 2020.

About

- Nuclear bombs are weapons of mass destruction. They harness the forces that hold the nucleus of an atom together by using the energy released when the particles of the nucleus (neutrons and protons) are either split or merged.
- Nuclear weapons are made using fissile material which can be either **highly enriched uranium (HEU)** or separated plutonium.
- There are two ways that nuclear energy can be released from an atom:
  - **Nuclear fission** – the nucleus of an atom is split into two smaller fragments by a neutron. This method usually involves isotopes of uranium (uranium-235, uranium-233) or plutonium (plutonium-239).
  - **Nuclear fusion** – two smaller atoms are brought together, usually hydrogen or hydrogen isotopes (deuterium, tritium), to form a larger one (helium isotopes); this is how the sun produces energy.

Key-highlights of the Report

- Both nuclear neighbours of India-China and Pakistan-have more warheads than its inventory.
  - **Pakistan:** Pakistan ranks sixth, with 160 nuclear warheads, just above India among the nuclear weapon countries. There is a significant development, according to SIPRI report, in Pakistan's nuclear weapon programme.
  - **China:** China's nuclear warhead count stands at 320 - that is, more than double the number that India has. SIPRI says China is in the middle of a significant modernisation and expansion of its arsenal.
- China and Pakistan have had more nuclear warheads than India in the past as well.
- Russia leads the world with 6,375 warheads, followed by the US with 5,800, and the UK with 215 warheads.
- Israel is believed to possess between 80 and 90 nuclear warheads.
- The nine nuclear-armed states—the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, China, India, Pakistan, Israel and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea)—together possessed an estimated 13,400 nuclear weapons at the start of 2020.

What's used in the production?

- Pakistan has produced mainly HEU but is increasing its ability to produce plutonium.
- China, France, Russia, the UK and the USA have produced both HEU and plutonium for use in their nuclear weapons.
- India and Israel are the only countries to have produced mainly plutonium for their nuclear warheads.

Is there any active deployment?

- There is no active deployment of nuclear warheads in South Asia.
  - Only four countries - the US, the UK, Russia and France, have deployed nuclear warheads.
- So, Indian borders are free of deployed nuclear weapons.

The situation in India

- India has moved slowly to build its **nuclear-triad**. After developing land and air "vectors" (carriers of nuclear warheads - Agni series of missiles for the Army and Mirage-2000 and Jaguar fighters of the Air Force), India is boosting naval nuclear prowess.
- INS Arihant became n-capable in 2018. INS Arighat is on the course.
- India has become the third largest spender on military for the first time and is second biggest importer of arms in the world.
- But it still spends only a little over one-fourth of China's military spending.

About SIPRI

- Based in Stockholm, SIPRI is an independent international institute dedicated to research into conflict, armaments, arms control and disarmament.
- Established in 1966, SIPRI provides data, analysis and recommendations, based on open sources, to policymakers, researchers, media and the interested public.

4 'ASEAN Special Summit'

Context: The online ASEAN Special Summit and ASEAN+3 Special Summit on Covid-19 response took place in Hanoi, Vietnam, chaired by Prime Minister Nguyen XuanPhuc, chairman of ASEAN and of ASEAN+3.

About

- The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (more commonly known as ASEAN) is an intergovernmental organization aimed primarily at promoting economic growth and regional stability among its members.
- There are currently 10 member states: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia and Vietnam.
- **Chairmanship of ASEAN rotates annually,** based on the alphabetical order of the English names of Member States.
- ASEAN aims to promote collaboration and cooperation among member states, as well as to advance the interests of the region as a whole, including economic and trade growth.
- It has negotiated a free trade agreement among member states and with other countries such as China, as well as eased travel in the region for citizens of member countries.

Key-highlights of the meeting:

- Leaders of the 10-nation bloc and their partners from three ASEAN partners, namely China, the Republic of Korea and Japan, discussed measures and initiatives to strengthen co-operation in the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic to ensure dynamic and sustainable development in the region in the long run.
- They are expected to adopt a joint statement of the ASEAN Summit and another of the ASEAN+3 Special Summit on COVID-19 response, in which they will affirm their commitment to preventing and eliminating the risk of the pandemic which is threatening people's lives, and in stabilising the socio-economic situation in each member state.
- Addressing the opening ceremony, Vietnam's PM stressed the significance of the meeting with COVID-19 spreading across the region and the world.

- All ASEAN member countries have strived to fight the pandemic which has harmed the lives of all citizens and socio-economic development, particularly the services sector which accounted for 30 per cent of the total GDP of ASEAN, threatening sustainability and social security.
- However, he noted that during this difficult time, the solidarity of the ASEAN Community has brightened, shouldering together to overcome difficulties.
- This was demonstrated by the ASEAN Chairman's Statement on ASEAN Collective Response to the Outbreak of Coronavirus Disease 2019.
- Member countries have enhanced co-operation in health care, national defence, economy and tourism; and supported each other.
- ASEAN's efforts have brought encouraging results, putting the pandemic under control.
- The number of COVID-19 cases in ASEAN stands at about 15,000 among more than 650 million citizens, lower than the global rate.

The origin:

- ASEAN was founded half a century ago in 1967 by the five Southeast Asian nations of Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.
- This was during the polarized atmosphere of the Cold War, and the alliance aimed to promote stability in the region.
- Over time, the group expanded to include its current 10 members.
  - Regional cooperation was further extended with the creation of the ASEAN Plus Three forum in 1997, which included China, South Korea and Japan.
  - And then the East Asia Summit which began taking place in 2005 and has expanded to include India, Australia, New Zealand, Russia and the United States.

v ASEAN Economic Community (AEC):

- In 2015, ASEAN established the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), a major milestone in the organization's regional economic integration agenda.
- The AEC envisions the bloc as a single market with free flow of goods, services, investments and skilled labour, and freer movement of capital across the region.

Economic importance of ASEAN:

- If ASEAN were a country, it would be the seventh-largest economy in the world, with a combined GDP of $2.6 trillion in 2014.
- It is project that by 2050, ASEAN will rank as the fourth-largest economy of the world.
- Home to more than 622 million people, the region has a larger population than the European Union or North America.
- It also has the third-largest labour force in the world, behind China and India.

5 'New Development Bank'

Context: India's Finance and Corporate Affairs minister NirmalaSitharaman attended the 5th Annual Meeting of Board of Governors of New Development Bank through video-conference.

About

- The NDB is a multilateral development bank established by Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS)
- The BRICS bank aims to achieve the objective of financing infrastructure and sustainable development projects in BRICS and other emerging economies and developing countries.
- The NDB was initially India's idea, which it shared with other BRICS members in 2012.
- After two years of negotiations, the bank was created at the 2014 BRICS summit in Fortaleza, Brazil.
- NDB has so far approved 14 projects of India for an amount of $4,183 million.

Key-highlights of the meet:

- India asked the New Development Bank (NDB) to enhance emergency facility to $10 billion to deal with the challenges posed by the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic.
- The country appreciated the efforts of the multilateral lending agency on fast tracking of financial assistance of about $5 billion to BRICS countries, including an emergency assistance of $1 billion to India to combat COVID-19 pandemic.
- Lauding efforts of the NDB in establishing itself as a credible Global Financial Institution, India said it should take appropriate actions to join G-20 forum along with other **Multilateral Development Bank (MDBs)/ International Financial Institutions (IFIs).**

Measures taken by India to respond to COVID-19 crisis

- Creating a COVID-19 Emergency Fund
- Allocation of $2 billion (Rs 15,000 crore) by the government for strengthening the healthcare system.
- Announcement of a scheme of social support measures amounting to $25 billion (Rs 1.70 lakh crore) to alleviate the hardship of the poor and the vulnerable.
- Insurance cover of $67,000 (Rs 50 lakh) per person to over 2.2 million frontline health workers and others provision of relief to firms in statutory and regulatory compliance matters.
- Easing of monetary policy by the Reserve Bank of India.
- Supplying critical medicine to the needy countries to tackle the COVID-19

6 'Special Drawing Rights'

Context: India will not support a general allocation of new 'Special Drawing Rights' by the International Monetary Fund as it might not be effective in easing coronavirus-driven financial pressure.

About

- The Special Drawing Rights (SDR) is an international reserve asset, created by the International Monetary Fund in 1969 to supplement its member countries' official reserves.
- The SDR serves as the unit of account of the IMF and some other international organizations.
- The SDR is neither a currency nor a claim on the IMF. Rather, it is a potential claim on the freely usable currencies of IMF members. SDRs can be exchanged for these currencies.

- The value of the SDR is based on a basket of five currencies:
  - the U.S. dollar
  - the euro
  - the Chinese renminbi
  - the Japanese yen
  - the British pound sterling

The SDR interest rate (SDRi):

- The SDRi provides the basis for calculating the interest rate charged to members on their non-concessional borrowing from the IMF and paid to members for their remunerated creditor positions in the IMF.
- It is also the interest paid to members on their SDR holdings and charged on their SDR allocation.

Background:

- The SDR was created as a supplementary international reserve asset in the context of the Bretton Woods fixed exchange rate system.
- The collapse of Bretton Woods system in 1973 and the shift of major currencies to floating exchange rate regimes lessened the reliance on the SDR as a global reserve asset.
- Nonetheless, SDR allocations can play a role in providing liquidity and supplementing member countries' official reserves, as was the case amid the global financial crisis.

Why India is opposing SDR allocation?

- The new SDR allocation would provide all 189 members with new foreign exchange reserves with no conditions.
- Such a major liquidity injection could produce potentially costly side-effects if countries used the funds for "extraneous" purposes.
- In the current context of illiquidity and flights to cash, the efficacy of an SDR allocation is not certain.
- Currently, most countries rely on national reserves as a first line of defense.
- Consequently, extraneous demands for these reserves, not related to domestic monetary and financial stability, would be costly, and hence cannot be supported.

About IMF:

- The International Monetary Fund (IMF) was conceived in July 1944 at the United Nations Bretton Woods Conference in New Hampshire, United States.
- The IMF promotes international financial stability and monetary cooperation.
- It also facilitates international trade, promotes employment and sustainable economic growth, and helps to reduce global poverty.
- The IMF is governed by and accountable to its 189 member countries. It is accountable to its member country governments.

7 'International Day of UN Peacekeepers'

Context: International Day of UN Peacekeepers is observed on May 29. On this day, tributes are paid to those people who have immensely contributed in the work done by the United Nations.

About

- The International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers is celebrated annually on May 29.
- This is the date when in 1948 the first UN peacekeeping mission named the "United Nations Truce Supervision Organization", or UNTSO, began operations in Palestine.
- The day is observed in honour of the uniformed and civilian personnel for thier contribution to the work of the organization.
- Moreover, the day is also celebrated to honour more than 3,900 peacekeepers who have lost their lives serving under the U.N. flag since the year 1948.

India & UN Peacekeeping Operation:

- Indian Army has been taking part in UN peacekeeping operations since 1950.
- Units and troops of the Indian Army have been part of 49 UN Missions with over 1,95,000 troops having served in various parts of the world.
- Presently, India is ranked as the third largest troop contributor to the UN peacekeeping missions.
- India currently contributes more than 5,400 military and police personnel to the UN peacekeeping operations in Abyei, Cyprus, Congo, Lebanon, the Middle East, Sudan, South Sudan, Western Sahara as well as one expert to the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia.

First Indian Peacekeeper:

- Major SumanGawani, an Indian Army officer and a Military Observer formerly deployed with the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), will receive the 2019 United Nations Military Gender Advocate of the Year Award along with Brazilian Navy officer Commander Monteiro de Castro Araujo.
- Major SumanGawani is also the first Indian peacekeeper to win the prestigious award.

The Theme:

- The theme of International Day of UN Peacekeepers 2020 is "Women in Peacekeeping: A Key to Peace".
- This theme has been chosen as it is the 20th anniversary of the of the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.
- Women peacekeepers make an invaluable contribution to peacekeeping and are essential for promoting sustainable peace and help in improving overall peacekeeping performance.
- They also help in improving the peacekeeping performance as well as help in promoting human rights, social parity and encourage women to become a meaningful part of peace.
- The world is facing one of its greatest challenges – the COVID-19 pandemic. Peacekeepers are assisting world governments as well as the local communities in response to the pandemic. Women peacekeepers are on the front lines during this battle, and the world is grateful for their hard work and sacrifices.

8 'India to deploy naval liaisons at Madagascar, Abu Dhabi for information exchange'

Context: After joining the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) as 'Observer', India is looking to post Navy Liaison Officers at the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre (RMIFC) in Madagascar and also at the European maritime surveillance initiative in the Strait of Hormuz for improved Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA).

About

- · The Indian Ocean Commission is a regional forum in the southwest Indian Ocean.
- · The IOC is particularly unique and is the only African regional organisation composed entirely of islands: **Comoros, France/Reunion, Madagascar, Mauritius and Seychelles.**
- · These islands are of special interest from sustainable development and environmental point of view.
- · They are particularly vulnerable to natural disasters (cyclones, tsunamis, drought and floods). They are at the frontline of climate change and are threatened by a rapid loss of marine and terrestrial biodiversity.'
- · China and the European Union (EU) have been Observers in the IOC since 2016 and 2017, respectively.
- · India became an Observer in March 2020 along with Japan and the United Nations.

Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre (RMIFC)

- The RMFIC functions under the aegis of the IOC.
- It is based in Madagascar. It is designed to deepen maritime domain awareness by monitoring maritime activities and promoting information sharing and exchange.

European maritime surveillance initiative in the Strait of Hormuz

- The EMASOH headquarters is composed of Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands and French officers and based at the French naval base in Abu Dhabi.
- The aim is "to monitor maritime activity and guarantee freedom of navigation in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz."
- EMASOH deploy air and naval units in the Strait of Hormuz and adjacent areas for peaceful surveillance of naval activity.

Why LO?

- The Navy LO is expected to be posted at EMASOH by July and at the RMIFC by September or October.
- India has an LO at the IFC in Singapore for over four years now.
- This will be in the overall realm of improving linkages of the Navy's **Information Fusion Centre for Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR)** in**Gurugram** with other IFCs and become the repository for all maritime data in the IOR.
  - The Navy set up the IFC-IOR in December 2018 within the premises of the Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC) in Gurugram to track maritime movements in the region.

- France became the first country to deploy a Liaison Officer at the IFC-IOR followed by the U.S. and several other countries including Australia, Japan and the United Kingdom have announced their intention to post LOs.
- Currently, infrastructure is being built to house the foreign officers. Pre-fabricated structures are being built and are expected to be ready by the end of the year.

9 'EnricaLexie Case'

Context: The Permanent Court of Arbitration in the Hague has upheld the conduct of the Indian authorities in the EnricaLexie case and which two Italian marines were accused of killing two Indian fishermen in 2012, and said India is entitled to get compensation in the case but can't prosecute the marines due to official immunity enjoyed by them.

About the case

- In February 2012, India accused two Italian marines, on board the MV EnricaLexie --an Italian flagged oil tanker-- of killing two Indian fishermen who were on a fishing vessel off Kerala coast in India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).
- India had detained the two marines after the shooting incident but later allowed them to return to Italy on specific conditions following separate orders by the Supreme Court.
- The issue of jurisdiction over the case became a big argument between the two countries.
- While India maintained that the incident happened in Indian waters and also the fishermen killed were Indian, and hence the case must be tried as per its laws.
- Italy claimed that the shooting took place outside Indian territorial waters and its marines were on-board the ship with the Italian flag.

What the International Tribunal has ruled?

- The international tribunal decided that India is entitled to payment of compensation in connection with "loss of life, physical harm, material damage to property and moral harm suffered by the captain and other crew members of St. Antony".
- The Tribunal upheld the conduct of the Indian authorities with respect to the incident under the provisions of the UNCLOS.
- It held that the actions of the Italian military officers and, consequently, Italy breached India's freedom of navigation under **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) Article 87(1)(a) and 90.**
- India is therefore precluded from exercising its jurisdiction over the Marines. The Arbitral Tribunal has therefore agreed on the Italian position that the Marines, being members of the Italian armed forces in the official exercise of their duties, cannot be tried by Indian courts.

Governance of the high seas

- The territorial jurisdiction extends to territorial water up to 12 nautical miles from the nearest point of the baseline; beyond territorial waters is the Contiguous Zone extending up to 24 nautical miles; and beyond that up to 200 nautical miles is the Exclusive Economic Zone of India.
- The jurisdiction of criminal courts in India is governed by the provisions of the Criminal Procedure Code as well as the IPC which, inter alia, define the territory of India.
- The IPC has to be read with the international obligations of India in UNCLOS.
- Article 97 read with Article 58 (2) states that the courts in Italy have the sole and exclusive jurisdiction in the matter.

- **Article 97 of the UNCLOS** clearly states that penal jurisdiction in matters of collision or any other incident of navigation involving penal or disciplinary responsibility lies either with the flag state or the state of which such person is a national.
- Furthermore, the Act specifically states that no arrest or detention of the ship even in the course of an investigation can be ordered by any authority other than that of the flag state.

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

- United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) or the Law of the Sea Convention or the Law of the Sea treaty came into operation and became effective from 16th November 1982.
- It lays down a comprehensive regime of law and order in the world's oceans and seas establishing rules governing all uses of the oceans and their resources.
- The Convention also provides the framework for further development of specific areas of the law of the sea.
- The Law of the Sea Convention says that military vessels have "right to innocent passage" to traverse the territorial sea of a coastal state without entering internal waters so long as they are not prejudicial to peace, good order and security of the coastal state.
- India signed the Convention on December 12, 1982 and ratified it on June 29, 1995.

10 'US votes against Cuba on UNHRC'

Context: The United States has urged UN members not to support Cuba's bid to join the organisation's Human Rights Council.

About

- The UN Human Rights Council is an inter-governmental body within the United Nations system responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe and for addressing situations of human rights violations and make recommendations on them.
- The UNHRC has "the ability to discuss all thematic human rights issues and situations that require its attention throughout the year".
- The Human Rights Council replaced the former United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR).

Membership

- The Council is made up of 47 UN Member States, which are elected by the UNGA through a direct and secret ballot. The General Assembly takes into account the contribution of the candidate states to the promotion and protection of human rights, as well as their voluntary pledges and commitments in this regard.
- The seats are distributed geographically and are awarded for a period of three years. Members are not eligible for immediate re-election after serving two consecutive terms.
- Seats on the Council are distributed as follows:
  - **African States:** 13 seats
  - **Asia-Pacific States:** 13 seats

- **Latin American and Caribbean States:** 8 seats
- **Western European and other States:** 7 seats
- **Eastern European States:** 6 seats

The upcoming elections

- As the UN Human Rights Council is set to elect 15 new members this fall, Russia and China are both vying for seats at the 47-nation group.
- Cuba, which sat on the UNHRC in 2014-2016 and 2017-2019, has applied to fill one of the regional vacancies for 2021-2023.

India and UNHRC

- India has been elected eight times to the UN Security Council.
- India was elected to the United Nations' top human rights body for a period of three years beginning January 1, 2019.
- India has been seeking a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council as a member of the G4, an organization composed of Brazil, Germany, Japan, and India, all who are currently seeking permanent representation.

11 OPEC+

Context: The collapse of alliance between Saudi Arabia and Russia threatens to plunge the industry into a generation-defining freefall with few precedents in modern history.

About

- OPEC+ refers to the alliance of crude producers, who have been undertaking corrections in supply in the oil markets since 2017.
- Currently, there are 21 sovereign producing nations complying with the alliance's decisions, with Saudi Arabia leading the 11 OPEC members party to the deal and 10 non-OPEC members led by Russia.

Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC):

- The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) is a group consisting of 14 of the world's major oil-exporting nations.
- OPEC was founded in 1960 to coordinate the petroleum policies of its members and to provide member states with technical and economic aid.
- OPEC is a cartel that aims to manage the supply of oil in an effort to set the price of oil on the world market, in order to avoid fluctuations that might affect the economies of both producing and purchasing countries.
- Countries that belong to OPEC include Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela (the five founders), plus the United Arab Emirates, Libya, Algeria, Nigeria, and five other countries.

Background:

- In 1985, Saudi Arabia, after years of shouldering OPEC production cuts nearly by itself, gave up

and launched a price war.

- Prices collapsed almost 70% between November 1985 and May 1986.
- The kingdom crashed the market again in 1997, its patience worn thin by Venezuela's over-pumping. In the next year and a half, prices fell 50%.
- And in 2014, Saudi launched a price war after it failed to convince non-OPEC countries, including Russia, to join in an output cutback. Prices declined 65% over the next six months.
- But none of those previous scenarios took place while demand was going through a brutal contraction, much less one triggered by the worldwide spread of a deadly virus.

The impact:

- The alliance between Saudi Arabia and Russia was the only thing that kept the world oil market from tumbling into the abyss.
- Now its collapse threatens to plunge the industry into a generation-defining freefall with few precedents in modern history.
- The most immediate pain is likely to be felt in the US shale industry, where companies have already been struggling as investors lost enthusiasm for the sector. In part, that's what the Russian energy ministry has been aiming for.
- Still, the hurt is likely to be spread much more widely across the world, from commodity-dependent countries like Angola and Oman, to energy giants like Exxon Mobil Corp and Royal Dutch Shell Plc.
- While Russia would not mind to back down and return to the status quo, Saudi Arabia appears determined to continue the confrontation. Their next moves will be determined by their readiness to take on further economic losses and their appetite for escalating tensions.

12 G20 Virtual meeting

Context: Leaders across the globe, including Prime Minister NarendraModi, participated in a virtual G20 Leaders' Summit to discuss strategies to combat the coronavirus pandemic.

About

- The Group of Twenty, or the G20, is the premier forum for international economic cooperation. The G20 brings together the leaders of both developed and developing countries from every continent. ?
- Collectively, G20 members represent around 80% of the world's economic output, two-thirds of global population and three-quarters of international trade.
- Throughout the year, representatives from G20 countries gather to discuss financial and socio-economic issues.?

Historical background:

- Originated in 1999 at the level of Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors, the G20 gathered for high-level discussions on macro-financial issues.

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- In the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis, the G20 was elevated to include the leaders of member countries.
- The first G20 Leaders' Summit took place in Washington D.C. in November 2008. Consequently, the G20 agenda expanded beyond macro-financial issues, to include socio-economic and development issues.

Key-highlights of the Summit:

- Leaders strategised ways to mitigate the global economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, along with other matters, at the 'Extraordinary Virtual G20 Leaders' Summit'.
- The G20 Leaders' virtual meeting has been organised following a telephone conversation between PM Modi and Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman. The PM has also been in talks with the Australian Prime Minister.
- At the meeting, G20 Leaders agreed to take all necessary measures to contain the pandemic and protect people.
- They also supported strengthening of the WHO's mandate in the fight against pandemics, including delivery of medical supplies, diagnostic tools, treatments, medicines and vaccines.
- Leaders also committed to use all available policy tools to minimize the economic and social cost of the pandemic and to restore global growth, market stability and strengthening resilience.
- G20 countries committed to inject over USD 5 trillion into the global economy to counter the social and economic impact of COVID-19.
- Leaders also agreed to contribute to the WHO led COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund on a voluntary basis.
- The summit followed a "Virtual G20 Sherpa" meeting.
- 90% of the COVID-19 cases and 88% of deaths were in G20 countries even as they share 80% of world GDP and 60% of world population. At the end of the Summit, a G20 Leaders' Statement was issued which called for a coordinated global response to fight the pandemic, adopting measures to safeguard the global economy, minimising trade disruption and steps to enhance global cooperation.

13 World Happiness Report

Context: The United Nations has released the World Happiness Report- 2019.

About

More on news

- The report was released by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network for the United Nations
- March 20 was designated as the World Happiness Day by the UN General Assembly in 2012.
- This is the 7th World Happiness Report. The first was released in April 2012 in support of a UN High level meeting on "Wellbeing and Happiness: Defining a New Economic Paradigm".
- That report presented the available global data on national happiness and reviewed related evidence from the emerging science of happiness.
- The report ranks countries on six key variables that support well-being: income, freedom, trust, healthy life expectancy, social support and generosity.

- The happiness study ranks the countries of the world on the basis of questions from the Gallup World Poll. The results are then correlated with other factors, including GDP and social security.
- This year's focus is on happiness and community: how happiness has been changing over the past dozen years, and how information technology, governance and social norms influence communities.
- In 2018 report, the theme was migration as one important source of global change, which revealed that each country's life circumstances, including the social context and political institutions were such important sources of happiness that the international ranking of migrant happiness was almost identical to that of the native born.

Highlights of the 2019 Report

- Indians are not as happy in 2019 as they were in 2018 and the country figures at 140th place, seven spots down from last year.
- The overall world happiness has fallen over the past few years, which has mostly been fuelled by a sustained drop in India.
- Finland has topped a global happiness ranking for the second year in a row.
- It beat Nordic peers Denmark, Norway and Iceland in a ranking of 156 countries by the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network.
- The UN's seventh annual World Happiness Report also noted that there has been an increase in negative emotions, including worry, sadness and anger.
- Pakistan is ranked 67th, Bangladesh 125th and China is place at 93rd.
- People in war-torn South Sudan are the unhappy with their lives, followed by Central African Republic (155), Afghanistan (154), Tanzania (153) and Rwanda (152).

What is Gallup Poll?

- It is a global analytics and advice firm that helps leaders and organizations solve their most pressing problems.
- It focuses on the choices and mood of employees, customers, students and citizens in countries of the world.
- It tries to know what matters most to them at work and in life and how those priorities change over time.

United Nations Sustainable Development Solution Network

- The UN SDSN has been operating since 2012 under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General.
- SDSN mobilizes global scientific and technological expertise to promote practical solutions for sustainable development, including the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Climate Agreement.
- The aim is to accelerate joint learning and promote integrated approaches that address the interconnected economic, social, and environmental challenges confronting the world.
- SDSN works closely with United Nations agencies, multilateral financing institutions, the private sector, and civil society.
- The organization and governance of SDSN aims to enable a large number of leaders from all regions and diverse backgrounds to participate in the development of the network.

- It acts as the board of SDSN. Much of SDSN's work is led by National or Regional SDSNs, which mobilize knowledge institutions around the SDGs.
- Several Thematic Networks mobilize experts from around the world on the technical challenges of implementing the SDGs and the Paris Climate Agreement.
- SDSN has a small secretariat with offices in New York, New Delhi, and Paris.

14 Commonwealth Health Ministers' Meeting'

Context: Health Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan today participated in the 32nd Commonwealth Health Ministers' Meeting through Video conference, where he highlighted the timely, graded and pro-active measures taken by India towards COVID-19 management.

About

- The Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting (CHMM) is the annual meeting of health ministers from across the Commonwealth countries.
- The meeting reviews activity and events from the previous year and provides a platform for countries to bring issues of health relevance to the attention of their Commonwealth partners and peers.
- Each CHMM provides a ministerial statement summarising the discussion and priorities for the coming year including setting the theme for the next meeting.
- CHMM is held every year in Geneva in mid-May.
- CHMM is supported by the Commonwealth Advisory Council on Health (CACH) which meets twice a year.

The Commonwealth

- The Commonwealth is a voluntary association of 54 independent and equal countries. It is home to 2.4 billion people, and includes both advanced economies and developing countries.
- In 1931, the British Commonwealth of Nations was founded under the Statute of Westminster with five initial members - the United Kingdom, Canada, the Irish Free State, Newfoundland, and the Union of South Africa.
- (Ireland permanently left the Commonwealthin 1949, Newfoundland became part of Canada in 1949, and South Africa left in 1961 due to apartheid but rejoined in 1994 as the Republic of South Africa).
- The Commonwealth had no constitution until it adopted its Charter in 2012, which commits members to 16 core values of democracy, gender equality, sustainable development and international peace and security.
- Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGM) are held every two years to discuss issues of common interest.

Highlights

- The meeting was due to take place in Geneva this month but was moved online in light of the coronavirus pandemic.

- The theme of the meeting, "Universal Health Coverage: Reaching the unreached, ensuring no one is left behind", emphasised the importance of UHC as a means of securing a more sustainable future for Commonwealth citizens.
- This entailed the inclusion of women, young people, adolescents and other vulnerable populations, such as those with mental health challenges or disabilities, not only as recipients of health services, but also as sources of innovative solutions and equal partners in service delivery.
- Participating in the meeting the Union Health Minister expressed his deepest condolences and concern at the loss of lives due to COVID-19.
- He further added that the Health Ministry of India acknowledge the tremendous contribution of the numerous frontline health service providers as well as other civic bodies in saving precious lives.

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